TRENDS

Apple's New Designs for The Digital Home

Apple Computer ***(www.apple.com)*** rang in the New Year with a flurry of announcements aimed at cementing its place as a hub for consumer digital devices. Topping off the news from Cupertino was the unveiling of the redesigned iMac, the updating of Mac OS X to support more peripherals, and the launching of the iPhoto digital file-storage and -manipulation system.

The revamped iMac captured the lion's share of the attention for its innovative appearance, with reactions varying from wild praise to dismissive comparisons to a desk lamp. The new design features a 15-inch flat-panel display connected to a dome base with a pivoting arm, five USB ports, and two IEEE 1394 (FireWire) ports.

Three new iMacs will be available this spring. The $1,299 entry-level model is based on a 700MHz PowerPC G4 processor, 128MB of RAM, a 40GB hard drive, and a CD-RW drive. For $200 more, consumers can purchase a model with 256MB of RAM and a combo DVD/CD-RW drive. The top-of-the-line version sells for $1,799 and is powered by an 800MHz G4 processor, a 60GB hard drive, and a SuperDrive DVD-R/CD-RW drive.

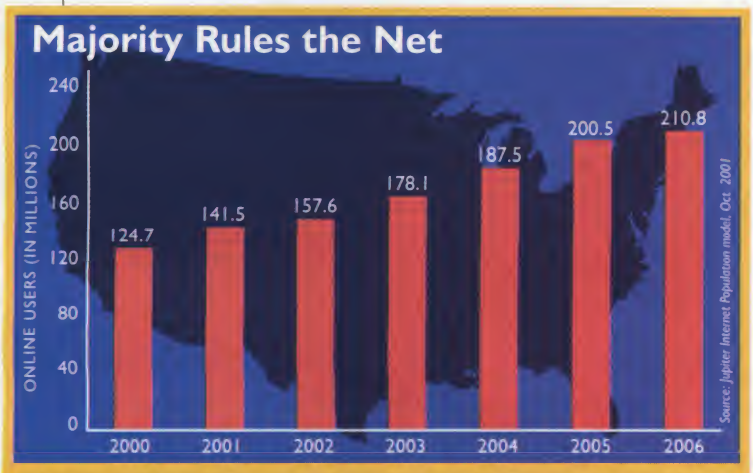
All Macs now ship with the latest version of OS X. Version 10.1.2 adds support for more peripherals, including devices with USB and IEEE 1394 connections, notably digital cameras and camcorders. It also increases support for PC Card-based storage devices, such as media readers, that are useful for transferring data between digital cameras and laptops.

Rounding out the announcements, iPhoto follows in the footsteps of iMovie and iTunes, programs that store, edit, and organize digital movie and music files, respectively. iPhoto does the same for digital images, while retaining the elegantly straightforward iTunes interface.

Still, it's too early to crown Apple the king of the digital home. Stephen Baker, an NPD Intelect analyst, believes the digital-hub concept is still in its infancy, and says Apple has a way to go before it can claim the mantle of leadership.

"Apple, consumer-electronics companies, and the IT world all have visions of what will work as a digital hub, and everybody's is different," Baker observes. "These things will be sorting themselves out for a while."

—Jon Halpin



The digital divide still exists, but signs indicate it may be shrinking. According to Jupiter Media Metrix, more than half of the U.S. population, about 157 million people, will log on to the Internet at some point in 2002. Not all of these users will log on via home PCs, however; some will access the Net at work or a friend's house. Still, by 2005, more than two-thirds of the population will be online.

Palm's Wireless Wake-Up Plan

Palm ***(www.palm.com)*** dominates the handheld-organizer market, but in the last year many mobile professionals have opted for the wireless e-mail capabilities of **RIM's** BlackBerry wireless organizers. Now, Palm has its own wireless organizer that will let you fetch your company e-mail from your car, bed, or just about anywhere else.

The new $449 Palm i705 delivers an always-on wireless connection to the Internet and your corporate e-mail. A "pushed e-mail" feature lets you receive e-mail on your Palm as soon as it's available, rather than only when you check for new mail. The device also comes with 8MB of memory, a Secure Digital expansion slot, and the standard 160-by-160-pixel display. Unlike the BlackBerry, the i705 does not have an integrated keyboard, but Palm will offer add-on keyboards separately.

To use the i705's wireless e-mail features, you must subscribe to one of **Palm.Net's** service plans. Prices range from $19.99 to $39.99 a month, depending on how many messages you send.

Palm i705

The release of the *i705* was made possible, in part, by Palm's acquisition of **ThinAirApps,** a company that specializes in secure wireless-access software. With ThinAir Server installed behind a corporate firewall, authorized users can send and receive e-mail from their company's intranet wirelessly on their PDAs, rather than using a desktop computer and virtual private network.

—Kevin Savetz